ZX Spectrum GAMER

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ZXSpec

ZX Spectrum GAMER

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Greetings Humans



I won't lie to you. It has been rather a long time since the previous issue. But to be fair, they only let me out last week.

But what an amazing time it is; the whole Spectrum scene buzzing with excitement with the prospect of a brand new machine - the Spectrum Next, created by Henry Oliphaunt, James Bagel and Victoria Treacle. At least I think that's what they're called, I spilled tea all over my notes and they're a bit smudged.

To celebrate this event, I'm looking at games all starting with N. I'll also be telling you how to win a Spectrum Next later in the magazine. Excited? You should be.

Anyway, read on, and no skipping to the end, you naughty person.

sunteam_paul

NEMESIS THE WARLOCK

PUBLISHER: MARTECH • **YEAR:** 1987 • **MEMORY:** 48K / 128K

Growing up reading the magnificent 2000AD, it's no surprise that I'm familiar with the original Nemesis the Warlock comic. It's certainly one of my favourites and I even have an original page of the artwork by David Roach (very nice man) hanging on my wall. So it's pretty safe to say I'm a big fan.



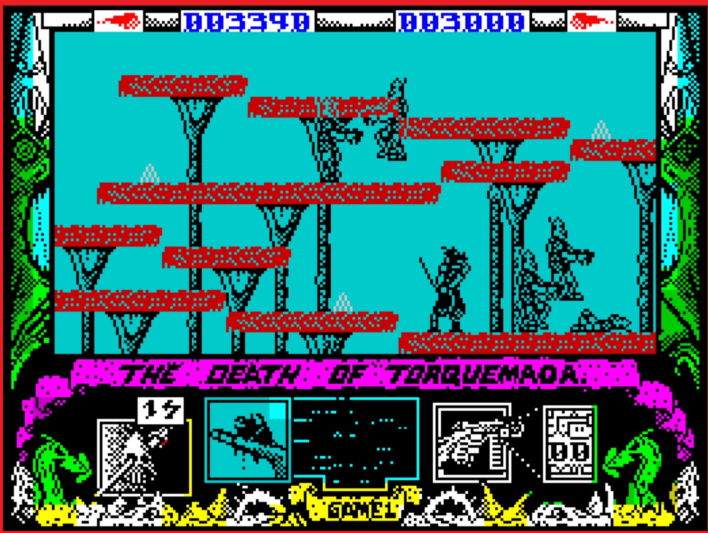
Gun loaded and at the ready, Nemesis slowly builds up a very satisfying mountain of Terminator corpses at the side of the screen.

The general plot of Nemesis revolves around the Warlock himself - a demon-like antihero alien and his arch-nemesis (har) Tomas de Torquemada, the very picture of a totally xenophobic dictator who rules over Termight. Nemesis himself is a morally grey character, and Torquemada is possibly one of the finest villains in comic history.

But it's safe to say you're not going to get the same depth of politics and social commentary with a Spectrum game, so temper your expectations and let's see what this release from Martech brings us.

The first thing you notice is a small selection of loading screens, that set up the story in a cool(ish) way. The second thing you notice (unless you're one of those paupers without a 128k machine) is the title music by the legendary Robert the Hubbard (or something). Not to put a finer point on it, it's a bloody great piece of music and certainly in my top 5 or 7 (maybe 8) tunes on the Speccy (possibly 9 or 10 then).

But enough fluff, let's redefine the controls (as always), hit that '5' key and jump into the game proper.



Run out of ammo? The Sword Sinister to the rescue.

Hrmm.

OK, so it doesn't really look as atmospheric as I'd expect a Nemesis title. The bright red platforms and light blue 'sky' are not particularly in keeping with the source material. However, the main sprite is suitably Nemesis-like and has some decent animation. It's just a pity that it looks a bit like a mess slapped on top of a mess when things get moving.

And there's no in-game music, which par for the course with lazy 128K versions, so beeper-style blips and blops it is.

So with the in-game audio and visuals a bit of a let-down, let's hope the game itself can make up for it.

You are presented with a single screen in which Torquemada's Terminators are leaping down from the top and generally wandering around, jumping a little bit and making a nuisance of themselves. You have to defeat a specific number of these minions (as noted in the rather attractive status area) before escaping the screen. There is only one exit on each screen and you must discover these by trial and error (to be honest they're not that hard).

Your initial weapon of attack is Excessus, the sword sinister, but by hoofing it over what looks like piles of Wile E. Coyote placed birdseed, you actually discover these are



One of the loading screens featuring some great art, and also informing the player of one of the gameplay features - that Torquemada can resurrect some corpses to fight again.

bullets and can begin blasting away at a distance.

Success with your gun can depend on finding a decent spot on each screen to clear the enemies, because as each is dispatched, their bodies start to pile up in gruesome mounds which can block the path of your shots. They also provide a handy way to jump up to higher platforms.



The squeezed heart shows that you are very close to death. Hurry!



Some levels feature these random flying drone thingies, probably on their way to deliver your Amazon order.

Once per level, you get the chance to gob a fireball across the screen, which is nice.

Nemesis the Warlock is a game I find tricky to fairly judge. Presentation is very nice, and the game is a bit of fun to play. And that's probably the best way to explain it. It's a bit of fun, not a lot, not a little, but a bit. That's probably enough to warrant giving it a go at least.

SP

The Rating Potato



VERDICT: While not a ground breaking comic license, it's worth a brief visit.



CAKE OF THE MONTH

YUMMY YUMMY YUMMY, I'VE GOT CAKE IN MY TUMMY

A true queen among cakes (ho ho), the celebrated Victoria Sponge is this month's cake of choice.

This is a good all-rounder of a cake and a safe bet at any gaming related cake party with its light sponge texture and lip-smacking yummy jammy filling.



Red Moon really brings out the flavour of the jammy interior, while retaining the sponge's moisture.

While the Victoria Sponge can be enjoyed with most titles, it really shines when playing text adventures. The taste can vary with the game; Red Moon is an excellent match, while Gremlins and most other Adventure International games are less well suited, causing the sponge to dry and clump in the player's throat, often hampering progress.



Gremlins is really more suited to a meringue based dessert, preferably with fruit as an option.

There is an important warning to note while gaming with the Victoria Sponge: crumbs in the keyboard. A particular problem is the Spectrum +2 or +3, where the crumbs seem to be magnetically attracted to the cracks between the keys. This is less of a problem if you are a user of the more classic rubber keyed Spectrum, however jammy fingers are equally threatening in this case.

So whatever your taste in games, make the Victoria Sponge your taste in cakes. Old queens have never tasted so good.

IMPORTANT: Please note that this article refers to the Victoria Sponge with NO cream as that is more suitable for action/adventure games.

THE GALLERY

featuring guest presenter bumbling caretaker Mr Bennett

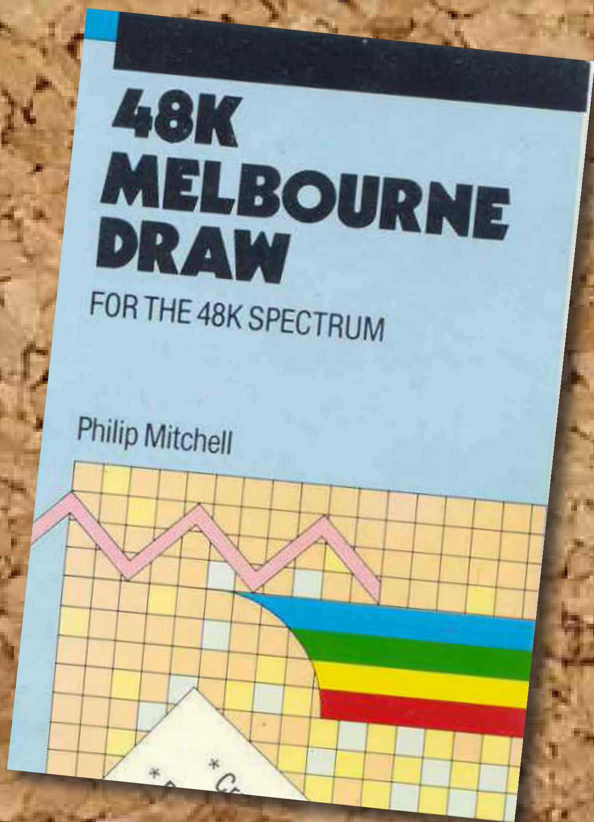




Tony is out of the office at the moment so I decided to take over for a while. Look what Simone from Newbury has sent. I really like its 'theme.' Whoops, I fell over my mop and now a bucket is on my head!

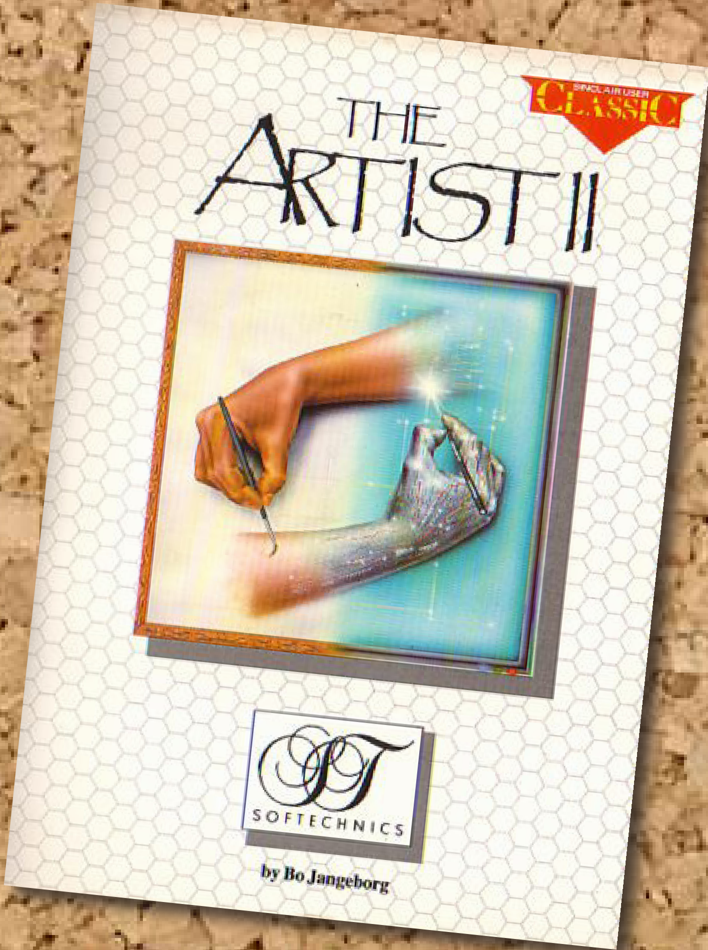


I like this piece from Andrew in Bolton. Its clear, defined lines remind me of my extensive cleaning rota. Oh dear, I spilled ink everywhere and now I've fallen off my chair!





Byron from Leeds has done a wonderful job with this truly arty contribution. The two hands remind me of the time that I accidentally locked myself in the broom cupboard with only Morph for company, as I cried out for food and he danced gently on my glans.







Rachel from Newcastle dared to send this lazy and untalented bit of junk to us. Just look at the hideous proportions! But I must dash. I need to remove all those candid photos of Margot pinned up in my office before she calls the police again.

NINJA COMMANDO

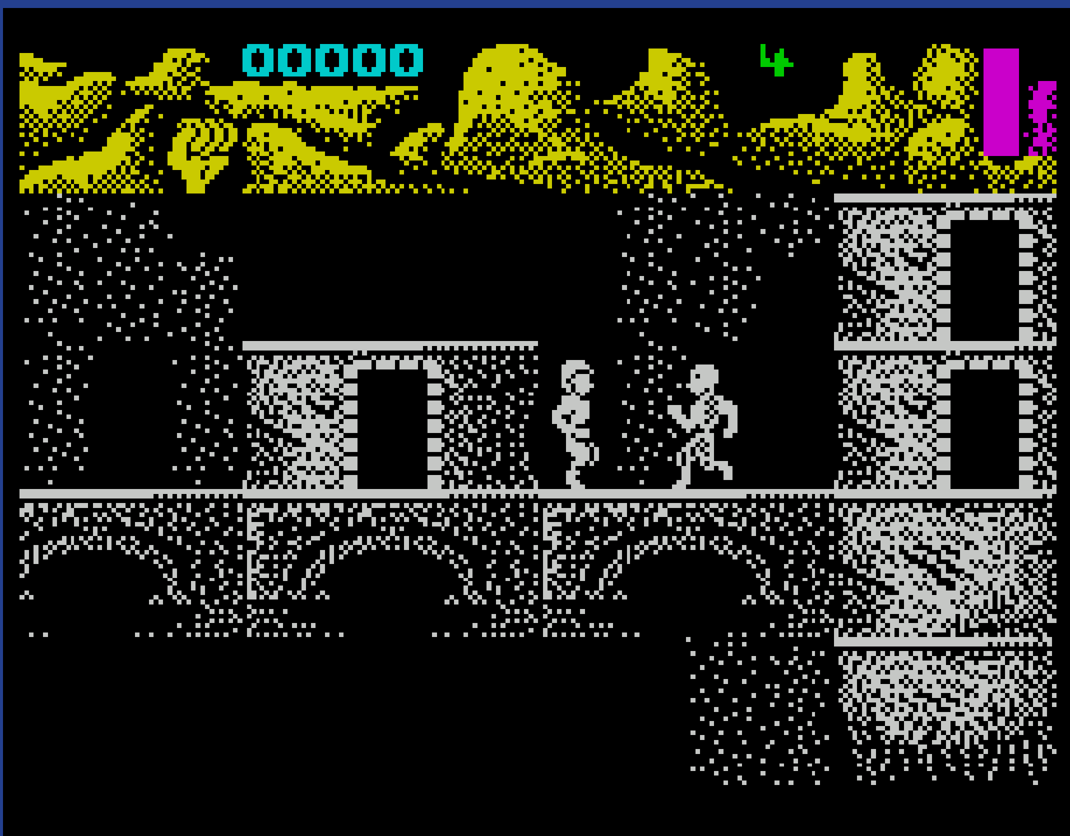
PUBLISHER: ZEPPELIN GAMES LTD • **YEAR:** 1989 • **MEMORY:** 48K

Ninjas eh? They get everywhere don't they, the sneaky buggers. Last week I found one under my sofa, and yesterday there was one hiding in my oesophagus.

But as every avid ninja-watcher knows, they are mostly to be found in dingy caves and sewers, leaping out of doorways and accosting unwary passers-by. At least that's what you're led to believe if you play budget title, Ninja Commando.

But while the other ninjas seem content with their random scampering, you are a ninja that has decided to break from tradition and run in one direction, through 8 levels, and escape to...whatever lies beyond I guess.

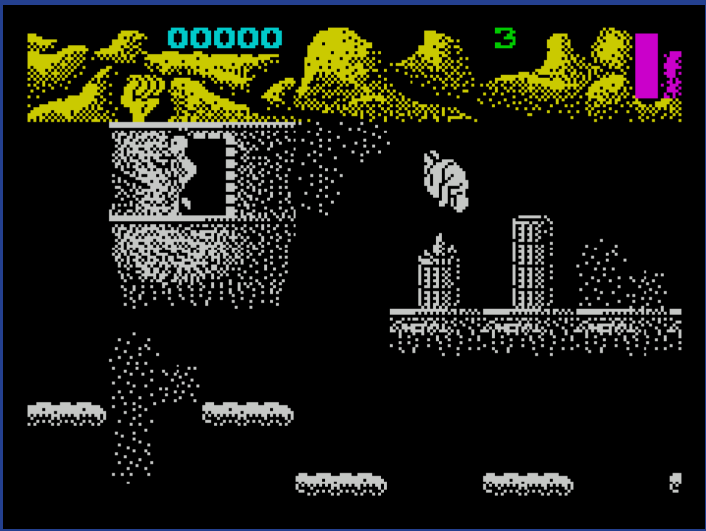
For some reason, your ninja friends seem upset about this and will take you down at a moment's notice if they are able to make contact with you. Unless you jump on their heads. Yes, you read that right, the traditional attack of ninjas and Italian plumbers everywhere.



Our hero, who has nipped out for a bit of light jogging.

If you manage to defeat enough of these ninjas, one of them may be foolish enough to drop a weapon, which can handily be picked up and used to dispatch some serious hooded justice.

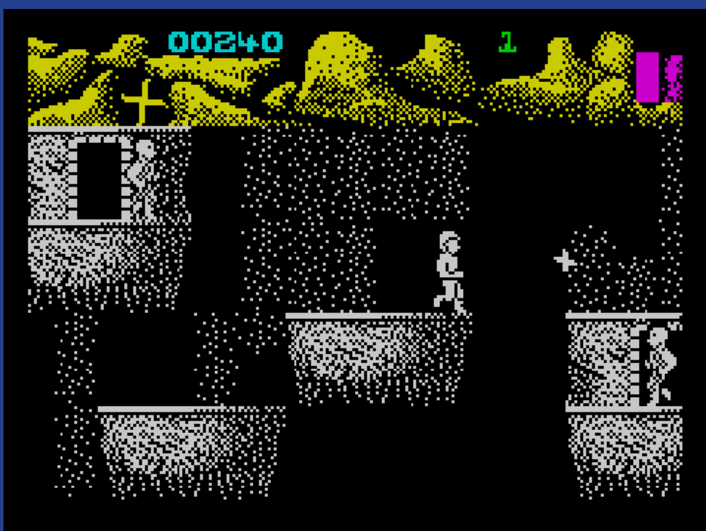
And that's about it really.



All the ninja skills are here, like jumping and throwing stars and, well, that's about it.

When I first started to play Ninja Commando, I was quite prepared to give it a jolly good slagging off for being your typical simplistic budget game. But everything was not entirely expected.

Of course, the sound is generally sparse and terrible, being silent except for deaths and kills which is a shame as most of your time is spent just running and jumping.



Weapons range from shurikens to bombs and flamethrowers. Don't rely on them too much, you'll find complacency gets you killed.

The graphics are actually not too bad. They do provide an acceptable form of atmosphere to the game and don't get too muddied up despite being monochrome. As a purely sideways scroller I feel there could have been more effort put into adding colour.

The character animation seems less appropriate that it should, your ninja seeming to engage in speed-walking

Ninja Facts

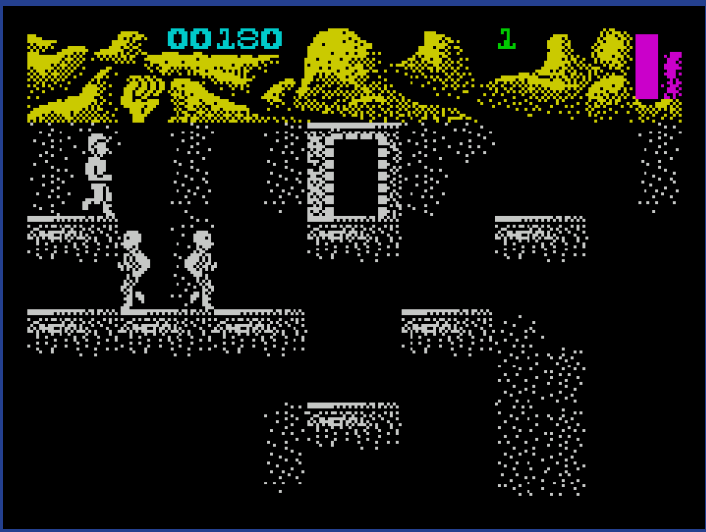
The word Ninja actually means 'one who hides the potato' due to their origin as street performers who did the ball-and-cup trick with tiny spuds.

Ninja never used throwing stars, which are purely a movie invention. Instead, they preferred to employ small vegetables (usually potatoes) on the end of a hemp rope to distract and lightly bruise their enemies from afar.

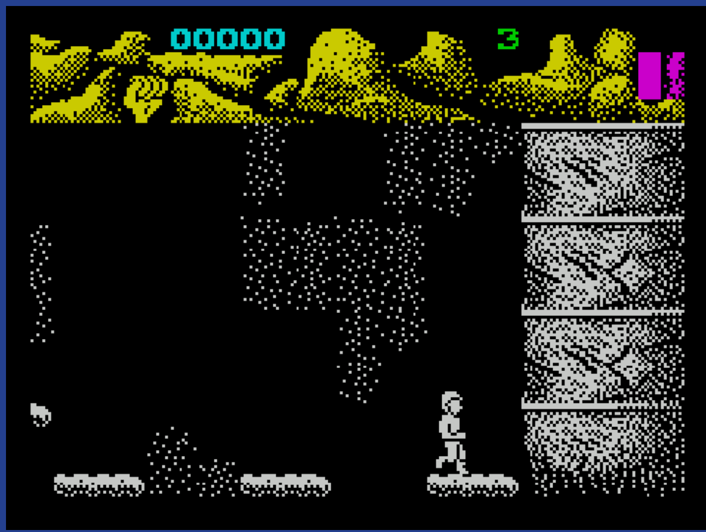
Ninja survival skills mean they always know what time of day or year it is. To do this, they would gently dig potatoes from the ground and examine their rings.

Ninjas do not like shelled animals, making the Teenage Mutant Ninja Turtles seem completely unrealistic.





As everyone knows, evil ninjas are defeated by jumping on their heads. But timing is crucial and it's usually best avoided in preference to just legging it.



Moving objects like these mines require careful timing to get past. What do you mean you can't see them? They're right there, honest.

rather than an outright run. He also doesn't really look so much like a ninja, rather a hairdresser or that guy who played Automan.

But all this aside, I actually began to like the game, just a little. There's a constant, steady pace to the running and jumping that means it's usually your faulty timing when you die (at which point you're thankfully not put back to the beginning). Completing the level then starts to become a challenge to yourself as you get just a little further each time you play.

I actually found the weapons a put-off and tended to die more when giving in to their temptation, but maybe that's just me. But in conclusion, it's a learning game with incremental success giving it a strangely addictive quality. Sure, it's still a bit crap, but for a budget title it's not quite as crap as you first imagine.

SP



VERDICT: Simplistic but strangely addictive, for a short while.

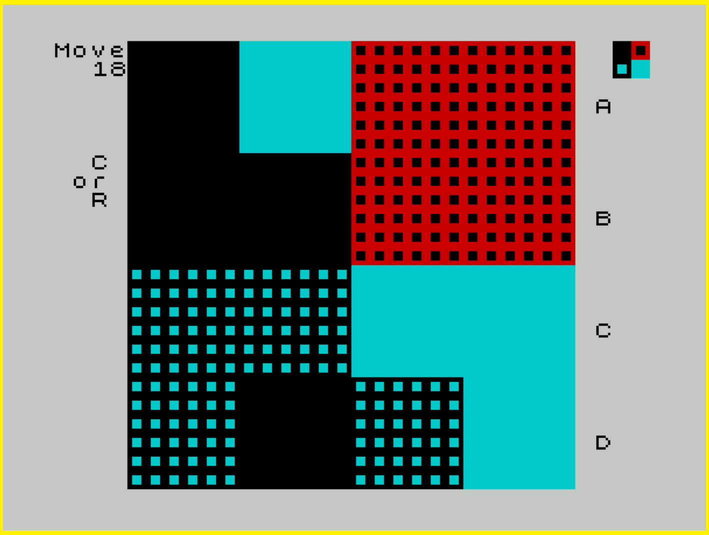
THE NOWOTNIK PUZZLE

PUBLISHER: PHIPPS ASSOCIATES • **YEAR:** 1983 • **MEMORY:** 16K

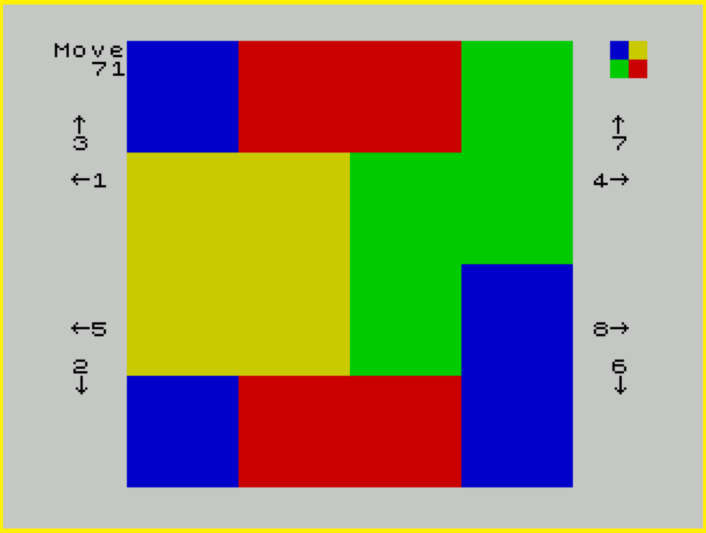
There is a certain nostalgic connection between myself and this game, it being one of those that I regularly noticed for sale on my weekly trips to the local video rental store. It's hard to say if I actually purchased it and returned it (as I certainly did with the appalling 3D Tunnel), or never purchased it at all. Both are sound options.

Created by Dr Nowotnik (at least he claims to be a doctor, I have yet to see solid proof of this fact), the almost unspellable Nowitnok Puzzle bears a certain resemblance to the unfathomably popular mental torture known as a Rubik's Cube.

At its very basic level, the Robotnik



The game even has a mode for black and white tellies, which is thoughtful of it.



The graphical polish and presentation is unmatched.

Puzzle is a 2x2 coloured pattern that shuffles itself up and must be remade by you, most likely once you get bored chewing on glass and are looking for something more mentally painful to do.

The game is split into two different puzzle variations; the first being of a sliding block format. By pressing the relevant key (which despite being displayed on screen, still manages to be confusing), you slide portions of the Numbongo Puzzle around until you complete it, or bring on a force 10 migraine.

The second variation of the game is even more confusing, yet strangely easier to complete. You have to



This shop is a few doors down from the video store where I regularly saw The Nowotnik Puzzle for sale. It's not there any more, but they did smashing jam doughnuts. Sorry, this isn't really relevant is it, but look, this space doesn't just fill itself.

choose a row or column in the shuffled Dubrovnik Puzzle and it gets mirrored/flipped in place.

Of course, each puzzle type has a set of skill levels, the harder ones breaking the pattern up into ridiculously small portions guaranteed to bring on a feeling of despair in those that attempt it.

You may be detecting a slight hint of negativity in this review so far, and this is where I should probably lay my personal biases bare on the table for all to see. I really don't enjoy this type of mental puzzling. My brain isn't wired for it. Even when I complete a puzzle, I don't get a sense of satisfaction - rather the lingering stench of frustration from the previous 20 minutes of torture.

Puzzle-de-dee

Below is a cryptic puzzle of my own devising. See if you can solve it!

I  RATHER  MY  OPEN

WITH A    ~~MAID~~ AND

BOIL MY  IN  ING HOT  OF

VEGE  SOUP THAN 

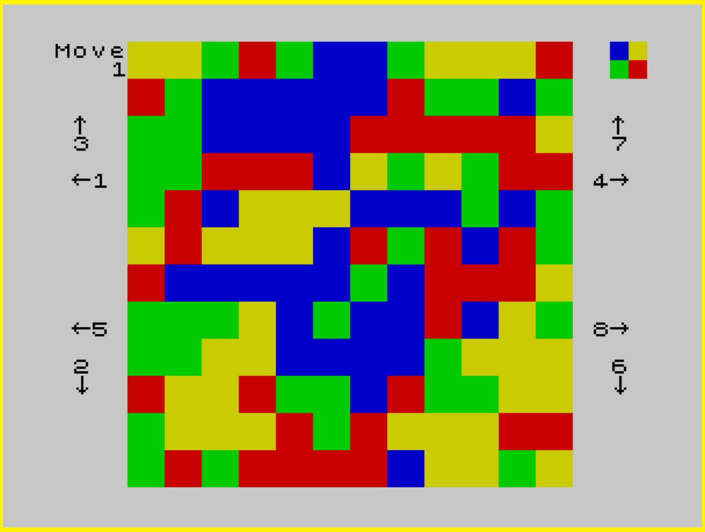
THE 

NOWOT  PUZZLE AGAIN.

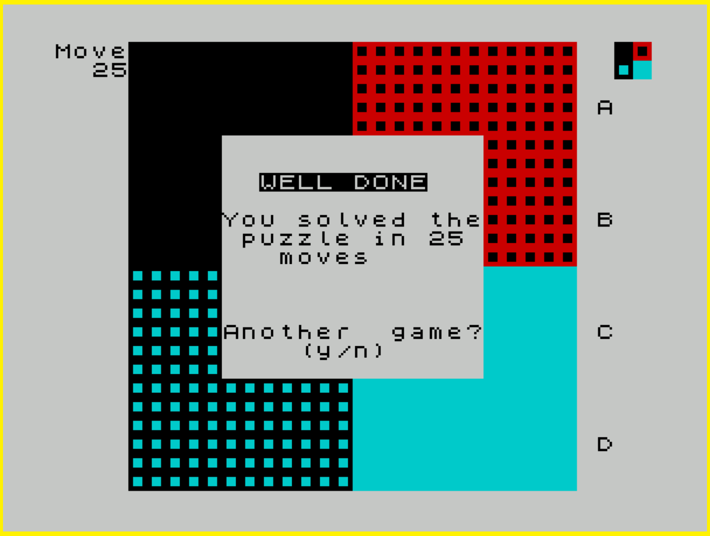


A word from our sponsor

Hi, I'm Patrick Bossert, author of best selling book 'You Can Do The Cube'. I've completed the Rubik's Cube in a number of places: riding a horse, on the edge of a lagoon and even in a badger's set. Once I completed the Rubik's Cube so fast I ruptured my spleen!



If you get bored puzzling, you could always use it to design a new quilt.



Hooray! Now I don't have to kill myself.

So let's be fair about this. Fans of this type of thing may get some enjoyment out of the Nitwoddle Puzzle - although not from the graphics, which are awful, or the sound, which is also awful.

If you 're not one of those people that wants to ram their head inside a wood chipper after 30 minutes with a Rubik's Cube, then it might be just for you. But the rest of us should just go and play Robocop instead.
SP

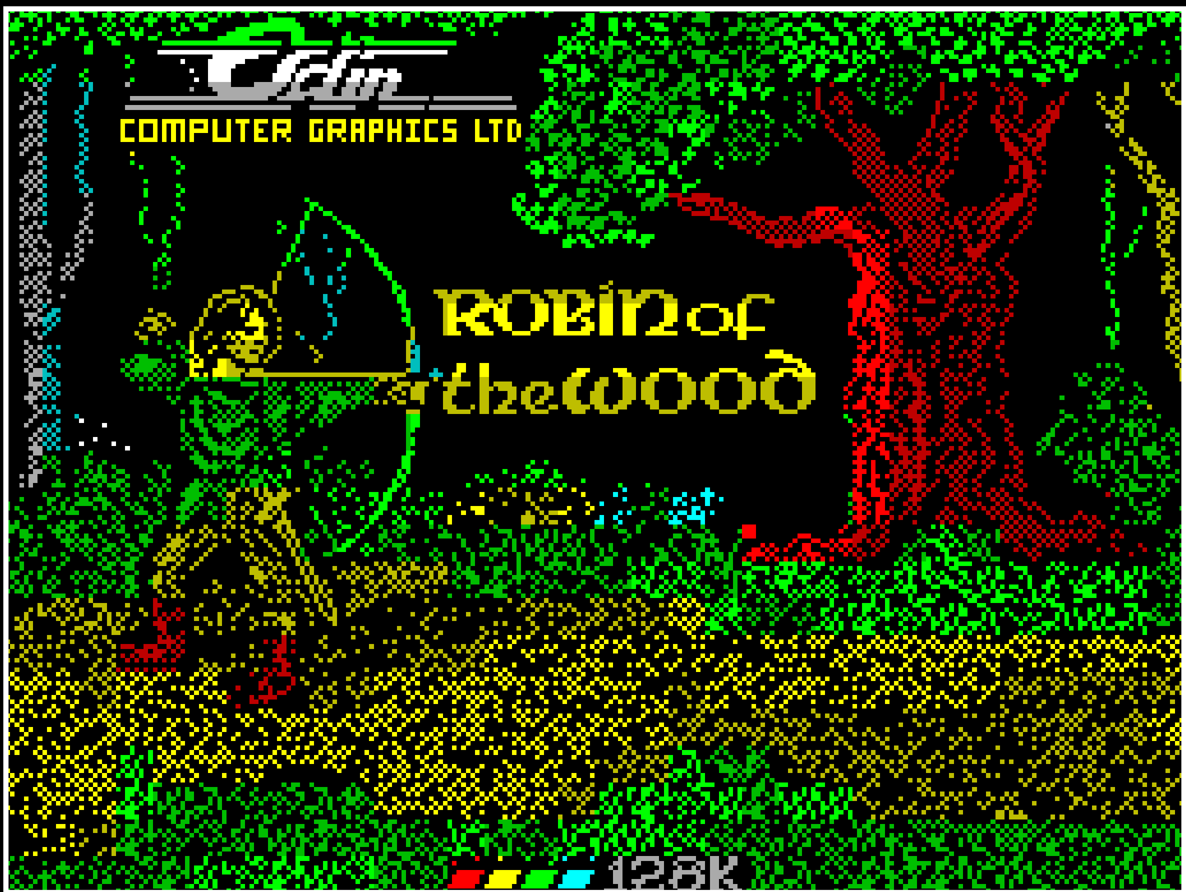


VERDICT: Hardcore puzzle fans might not despise this, but the bland presentation does it no favours.

LOAD ""



Atic Atac : Ultimate Play The Game : 1983



Robin Of The Wood : Odin Computer Graphics Ltd : 1985

THE NEXT SPECTRUM



With all the excited hype around the upcoming Spectrum Next, it would be remiss of me not to mention it in the mag, so I have secured an exclusive interview with the tramp who lives under the bridge down the road.

ME: So Tramp, what is your first memory of the ZX Spectrum?

TRAMP: Uh wumm muna waken me up for?

ME: Yes, very true. Why do you think the 8-bit era is making such a strong comeback in recent years? Is it purely nostalgia, or are people pining for the simpler, more immediate gameplay of the olden days?

TRAMP: 'Cha doin'? Duznno wattya tork'n abat. Naw naff me hurgle forreye belcha wun.

ME: That's a good point.
So what kind of impact is the Spectrum Next going to make on the current gaming community? Will it be a flash in the pan, or perhaps encourage a whole new generation of developers?

TRAMP: Gimme back mu whiskey, ya bast.

ME: How do you consider the issues of previous crowdfun- Wait a minute, you're David Hasselhoff aren't you?

TRAMP: Dammit, I've been rumbled. KITT, get me out of here now!

ME: Hey, wait! Come back here!

And there he goes, off into the sunset, engine roaring and jeans stained with yesterday's booze.

How to Win a Spectrum Next!

1. Wait for someone to run a competition to win a Spectrum Next.
2. Enter the competition and win.



What Dreams May Come

If there's one thing that the Spectrum has always stood for, it's creativity. A machine that is home to a massive variety of games, where developers could try out new ideas and game concepts just because. It was a machine that made people excited to just try and make 'stuff'.

I would spend hours typing in BASIC programs from magazine listings, and eventually went on to make my own, very simple, affairs (I could never get my head around machine code). The +3 allowed me further creative freedom, with the fast loading of the disk drive and RAMdisk that really helped me do some cool animations.

Now, the Next is looming on the horizon and I already see people excited again about creating. Even with all the modern tools today, there's something special about making new games for the humble Speccy.

Even though assembly is still a confusing and soul destroying nightmare of many of us, we should not give up hope.

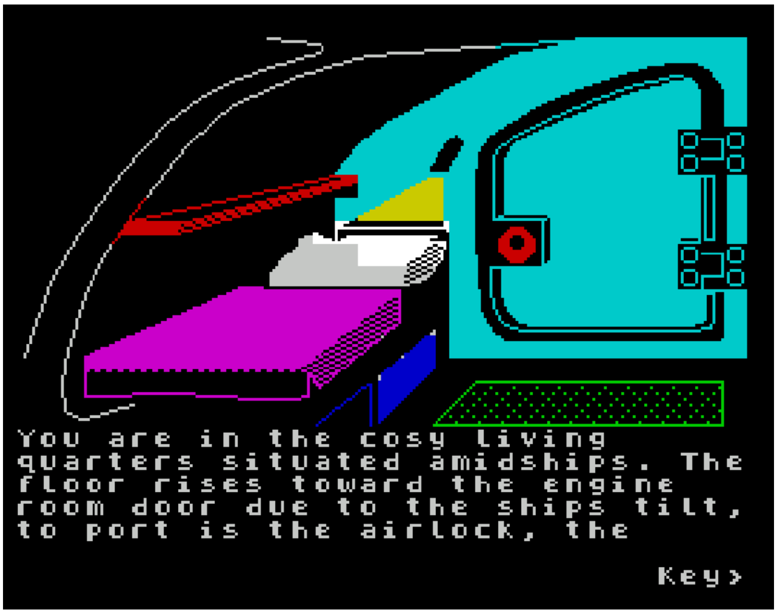
The superb Arcade Game Designer by Jonathan Cauldwell has been the glue behind many a recent Spectrum homebrew titles and a Next version is reportedly in development.



AGD has been the basis for the majority of recent Spectrum homebrew titles, such as Zombo by Malcolm Kirk.

Also, it has been noted that Tim Gilberts (of Gilsoft fame) has shown interest in bringing the Professional Adventure Writing System (PAW) to the platform.

I believe that both these pieces of software could be crucial in the long term, allowing average Joes like you and me to create essential content that will keep the machine and its community alive, hopefully for years to come. It's not just a machine for playing games, it's a machine for playing in the sandbox of your imagination. New games, new creators - that's my dream for the future of the Next.



PAW was the pinnacle of adventure game creators in its time, refining the best of The Quill and The Illustrator.

Speaking of dreams, let's finish off with some images from a nice dream I had last night. Sleep well!



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